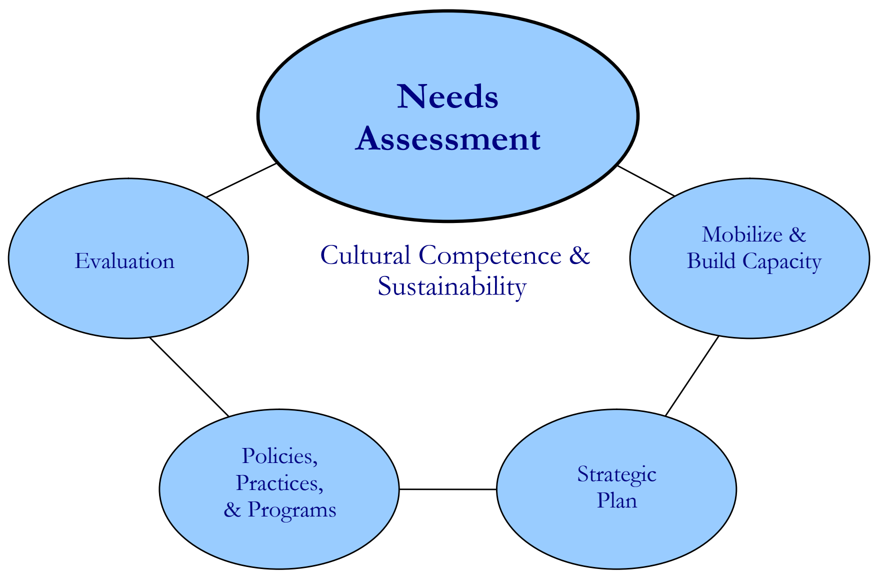
Utah SPF SIG Training Manual
Section 6

Methods for Collecting Additional Data



SPF SIG Training Manual
Section 6
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Objective: ✓ Become familiar with methods for collecting additional data.

Things you will need for this section:

- ✓ LSAA Epi Profiles (Training Manual Section 4)
- ✓ Identifying Additional Consequence, Consumption and Causal Factor Data (Training Manual Section 5A and/or 5B)
- ✓ SPF SIG Tool Kit (Training Manual Section 7)
- ✓ Guidelines for Conducting Focus Groups

Be sure that you have read Training Manual Sections 1 through 5 prior to proceeding.

Overview of Methods for Data Collection

So far, you have identified your data gaps and the data you need to fill those gaps. What's the best way to gather the information you need? The goal in data collection is to minimize the number of collection instruments you use and maximize the amount of information you collect from each one. In Section 5, we have provided you with suggested ways of collecting the various types of data that you need. When choosing the best data collection method to obtain the information you need, consider the following:

- Which methods will be least disruptive to those providing the data?
- Which methods can you afford and implement well?
- Which methods are best suited to obtain information from your sources (considering cultural appropriateness and other contextual issues)?

Most of the data you gather will already exist in various data sources, but you will also have to gather some original data. Possible data gathering methods that you might use include:

- Original data collection through interviews with key informants
- Original data collection through surveys
- Original data collection through conducting focus groups
- Research of existing information or data
- Environmental scans

All these sources of information have pluses and minuses. When deciding which data collection methods will work best, it is important to identify the level of effort required to collect the data. Consider the cost and time required to create new data collection tools if they are not already available and to actually collect and analyze the data. Some methods require more resources than others. For example, interviews take more time (and therefore resources) than surveys but do give you more information. For any of these collection methods, it is important to focus your data collection to obtain information for

Don't Collect Data Just Because You Can
There will always be more data that you could collect, but that doesn't always mean you should. When deciding whether to collect data, always consider how you will USE the data. If it isn't going to contribute in a meaningful way to the task at hand, don't collect it.

a purpose. For the Strategic Prevention Framework, the main purpose of data collection is to clarify consumption and consequence patterns to determine if you should target a specific population (and for some of you to identify a priority) and to further define causal and contributing factors. Throughout the rest of this section, each of these data collection methods will be discussed and tools will be provided to help you carry them out. Although we provided you with recommendations in Sections 5A/5B on which methods we feel will be most appropriate for the various data you need to collect, ultimately which data collection methods you choose to use are up to you and your coalition. As always, help is available from Susannah or Bach Harrison in helping you with your decision.

Summary of Data Collection Methods		
Type	**Pros**	**Cons**
Focus groups	Supplements data findings with personal experiences and perspectives.	Time consuming to arrange groups. Can be difficult to recruit participants. Data based on group members' perceptions/biases.
Key Informant Interviews	Collects on-the-ground and in-depth knowledge of policies and practices.	Data based on interviewee's perceptions/biases. Time consuming to conduct multiple interviews.
Environmental scans	Efficient way to measure availability and promotion. Can involve the community.	Difficult to conduct for a large geographic area.
Surveys	Collects the information you want; allows for statements such as "20% of residents responded that…" Can be compared to other data.	Require technical knowledge to design. Can be very costly or time consuming. Too few responses or nonrepresentative samples can make results invalid.
Research Existing Data	Uses fewer resources and faster than other methods.	Quality of data. May be difficult to find what you are looking for. Access issues.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can be used to gather qualitative information from your community about issues and attitudes. They are typically led by a facilitator who presents a small number of targeted questions and facilitates the discussion. Participants share ideas and observations that can clarify issues for you or present new perspectives. Compared with surveys and other methods, focus groups allow you to delve more deeply into a topic area or to probe for more information. Focus groups also can lead you to topics or points that you had not considered. They are particularly effective when you don't have a lot of information on a topic. Recruiting and conducting effective focus groups can be challenging and time consuming. The purpose of your SPF SIG focus groups is generally to gain the community's perspective on substance use and related consequences. Your questions will be tailored to address specific areas in which you need more information such as causal factors and contributing factors. Your focus groups will be targeted to different age groups and types of people. Your committee and/or coalition will be especially useful in making decisions about

> **Focus Groups with Youth**
> *You will need to obtain parental permission for youth to participate in your focus group. To make this easier, consider asking the parents of your youth participants to be in your parent group. Then hold the youth and parent focus groups concurrently in order to facilitate participation.*

who to invite and how to encourage them to participate. One risk of focus groups is that participants may repeat popularly held misconceptions about the community. For example, if a certain drug has recently received a lot of attention in the media, community members may have an inflated view of the prevalence of that drug in the community. For this reason it is important to be careful when designing questions and interpreting the answers.

Because running focus groups effectively requires skill and know-how, an in-depth guide to focus groups is contained in the separate document: Guidelines for Conducting Focus Groups. You should read this thoroughly, as much of your data collection will involve focus groups. Tools for conducting the focus groups are found in your SPF SIG Tool Kit (Training Manual Section 7).

Key Informant Interviews

One way to collect data is to interview key partners, informants, and stakeholders in your community to help provide a better picture of how and whether the various consequences, consumption patterns and causal factors are operating in your community. These interviews can provide you the perspectives of people who observe and monitor community functioning in the area you are interested in. Their perspectives can provide a meaningful assessment of substance use and consequences observed within their areas of responsibility. They can also add to your knowledge of causal and contributing factors by lending understanding to the “when, why, and where” of substance use and the related consequences. One risk of informant interviews is that you may get a slanted or one-sided perspective on a problem, particularly when asking for subjective information. For this reason it is important to consider what others have to say and what your other data tell you.

Step One: Identify Who to Interview

Based on the initial data examined and the knowledge gaps that you have identified, determine what types of experts should be contacted. Principals, teachers, school counselors, caseworkers, sheriffs, parks and recreation staff, shelter staff, probation officers, police officials, pharmacists, youth, doctors, hospital staff and emergency responders are examples of community experts. Who you should interview depends on the type of data you are trying to collect and its purpose.

Once you have identified the general type of informant to interview, decide on the specific people that you would like to interview. In some cases, it may be a specific person(s) (e.g. the Chief of Police) because they hold specific knowledge that others are unlikely to have. In other cases, you are interested in a general group of people (e.g. treatment providers) but the specific person is less important. When you are interested in a general group of people, be sure to try to select as representative group as possible. It is important to note ways in which your sample is *not* representative of group you are interested in and keep these in mind when you are making interpretations and decisions based upon the data.

When choosing stakeholders, consider groups outside of the immediate target group. For example, if you are interested in law enforcement, you would likely interview the Chief of Police or other law enforcement staff. You may also want to consider interviews with emergency room staff, school officials, or treatment facility administrators about their interactions with the justice system. In general, consider what interviews would be the most appropriate and informative for your community and the data you are trying to collect.

Selecting a Representative Group
When selecting people, you can use a simple random sample or a stratified sample. In the simple random sample, you compile a list of all possible people (i.e. treatment providers) and randomly select a pre-determined number. A stratified random sample, an alternative to a simple random sample, provides more precision. In a stratified random sample, you divide the pool of people into several groups and then randomly select a fixed number of people from within each group. How you group the list depends on what you are interested in knowing. For example, you might group treatment providers by type of agency they work for or the type of clientele. A stratified sample makes sense when your people are heterogenous but they can easily be split into groups that are more homogenous. The numbers that you select from each group should normally be proportional to the size of the whole group. For example, if you know 40% of treatment providers work in community mental health agencies, 20% work in private practice and 20% work for a county agency, then it would make sense to randomly select four treatment providers from a community mental health agency for every two from a private practice and two from a county agency. You can use a stratified sample only when you know which subjects belong to which group prior to data collection. If you feel the group is similar on characteristics that are likely to influence their answers, simple random sampling will work fine.

Step Two: Identify the Questions to Ask

Your next task is to develop a list of the questions that you would like to ask. Try to limit the number of questions to ten so that you can leave some time for open-ended discussion. We have provided sample questions to ask in Sections 5A and 5B grouped by the data you are trying to gather, however, you may also develop some of your own. You may use some yes/no or multiple choice questions in your expert interviews, which can be analyzed quantitatively. However, be sure to ask open-ended questions as well, as they will give you more in-depth information and give respondents an opportunity to elaborate on their ideas and opinions. Open-ended interview questions need to be analyzed in a way similar to that used for focus groups (see Guideline for Conducting Focus Groups). The responses need to be carefully reviewed to identify the primary themes among interview participants. The themes should first be identified for a specific group (e.g., law enforcement) and then compared to other groups (e.g., emergency personnel). In some instances the groups will concur with one another, and in other instances the groups will report variations in opinions. Keep in mind that some of the questions you ask or want to ask might put the respondent in a situation where s/he feels concerned about confidentiality concerns or uncomfortable answering because of how the answer will reflect on them. Do what you can to mitigate these concerns and assure them of confidentiality. However, if you feel this will be a big issue, you might want to consider doing a targeted survey (see below). Targeted surveys can also be an option if your population of interest does not have a schedule amenable to giving interviews (i.e., physicians) or you do not have the time to conduct as many interviews as you would like or need.

Tip: Expert interviews allow you to ask the interviewee specific questions that may address a specific knowledge gap. Open-ended questions provide general themes for discussion, but allow community experts to introduce their own ideas and issues.

Step Three: Arrange the Interviews

Once you have decided whom you are interviewing and what questions you will ask, follow these steps:

- Decide who will do the interviews. Consider who has the time and ability to conduct the interview objectively and how the interviewees will respond to the interviewer. Depending on the nature of the questions and the group being interviewed, you and your committee or coalition will have to decide if is better if the interviewer and respondent know one another or not.
- Obtain the names and contact information for the informants that you would like to interview.
- Contact the individuals and ask them if they would be willing to participate in an interview, and if not, could they designate an alternate. Follow-up on phone messages or emails sent if you do not hear back.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and briefly discuss the purpose of the SPF SIG assessment. Give them an estimate of the time it will take.
- Assure the person that the responses to the interview questions will be confidential.
- Schedule a time to meet. Be as flexible as possible to decrease the burden on your interviewee.

Again, make sure that the interviews are focused on one of your identified knowledge gaps. Keep in mind that by interviewing different types of community experts, you will minimize the risk of obtaining information slanted by strong opinions and will keep the data more reliable.

Step Four: Go to the Interview!

It is a good idea to call and confirm your appointment the day or morning prior to the scheduled interview. This will minimize the likelihood of a wasted trip. Be sure to have directions to the location and arrive in plenty of time to find parking. Try to arrive 5-10 minutes early – don’t be late! Briefly remind them why you are interviewing them and address any confidentiality concerns. Be pleasant during the interview and don’t forget to thank them for their time. You might give them a Coalition brochure or other agency information. Bring along a form or paper for recording information. A generic Key Informant Interview Form, Data Collection Tool #1, is in your SPF SIG Tool Kit (Training Manual Section 7). You can adapt it to fit your needs. If you are going to tape the conversation you must ask for permission first.

Step Five: Post-Interview

Soon after the interview, read over your notes to make sure that they are legible. It is often difficult to read what we wrote or understand what we meant after a week or two. Also, send a small thank you note or email to thank your interviewee again. This is a good public relations opportunity for the SPF SIG project and your coalition.

Researching Existing Data

Gathering data that already exists is simple because is involves collecting information that is already out there. However, sometimes it can be difficult to know where to look for the data. Your committee and Coalition are great resources for identifying potential sources of information. Some types of data that you collect will be public domain and it is simply a matter of finding it. Other types of data, however, may require permission from an agency or may entail privacy concerns. Gaining these permissions may take some time. Be aware of these potentials and be ready to address them. Have a clear explanation of who you are, why you want the information, who will have access to it and exactly what you will do with it. You may need to sign formal agreements with the agency. Another issue is that the data may not be computerized and may require some compiling and organizing on your end. Be sure to give yourself enough time when gathering existing information to allow for these sticking points. Finally, be sure that in addition to the data itself, you get information on how the data was collected, when and by whom (when applicable). Make sure that you fully understand what the data mean. Find out if there were any issues in collecting the data that might affect validity (how well the information really captures what it was trying to measure). No source of data is perfect and, while this doesn't mean you shouldn't use it, you should be aware of its flaws and keep them in mind when making your decisions.

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You
Data without information on how and when the data was collected can do more harm than good.

Surveys

Surveys allow you to collect specific information on individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Surveys allow you to make statements such as "Twenty percent of college students surveyed report that …" and allow you to make comparisons to state data or other groups, or to gather information on an issue not included in a standardized survey. A large, community-wide survey is not required as part of this assessment due to the large amount of time and resources it takes to conduct a survey of this magnitude correctly. In addition to it being technically challenging, it can be difficult to get enough people to respond to a survey, and often requires significant follow-up activity. Too few responses can make your results invalid. However, you may conduct smaller, more "targeted" surveys toward certain populations. These can be used when the population you are interested in is fairly small and discrete and you have the ability to access them. For instance, you might decide to survey local wait staff or treatment providers. Targeted surveys often work well with populations that you have identified for key informant interviews. When doing a survey, the sampling concerns addressed in the section on Key Informant Interviews are the same. Often, with surveys, you will attempt to get as many of the targeted population to complete the survey as possible. There are a number of methods for conducting a survey; which you use will depend on your resources. You may decide to use a combination of surveys and interviews – attempting surveys first and then filling in representation gaps with interviews. If you decide to utilize surveys, you should get technical assistance from Bach Harrison prior to beginning. They will help you develop the survey and identify a strategy that will work best for you.

Tip: Get technical assistance prior to administering a survey.

Environmental Scans

Environmental scans are observations of various aspects of your community. For example, you could examine the practices businesses use to promote and sell alcohol products. Or you could review the use of public spaces and advertisements in print, radio and television to get an idea of the number of promotion versus prevention messages that are in the community. Environmental scans will primarily be used for the ARMVC priority in order to obtain more information about retail availability and promotion. Scanning for retail availability and retail outlet promotion can be difficult to conduct in a way that represents your entire LSAA, particularly if it covers a wide geographic region. If you do not have the resources to conduct an LSAA-wide scan, one way to focus your efforts is to target areas with a high density of what you are scanning (e.g. alcohol outlets or billboards). Scanning for media promotion is also important to find out the extent of advertising and how much of it promotes substance use. For this, you will want to do a scan of local media coverage, advertising and public service announcements in print, radio and television advertising.

The Where and What

There is no one way to conduct an environmental scan. The specific kinds of local environmental conditions that promote or discourage ARMVC will need to be determined by your community. We have provided a starting point in Section 5A/5B with some environmental scans for you to do; however, you need to determine if there is information we might be missing. Only then should you begin to design your environmental scan. With your committee, create a list of local community environmental conditions that promote or discourage heavy alcohol use and/or drinking and driving. You might pose the following questions to start the discussion:

- Who/what contributes to the “availability” of these regulated products?
- Who/what contributes to the “social norms” for heavy use of alcohol or drinking and driving?
- Who/what contributes to the “disorganization” around local alcohol control?

In addition to identifying what you are scanning, you must define the boundaries for your community’s environmental scan. For example, if you are looking at billboards, what are the geographic boundaries? If you are looking at retail outlets, use maps and address lists of outlets that sell or serve alcohol products within your area of interest.

Deciding Who Will Conduct the Scan

Conducting environmental scans is time intensive. It helps if you can identify volunteers or teams of volunteers who will implement the “scanning” part of the process. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways; you are limited here only by your creativity and the response to your call for volunteers. Consider using meaningful incentives of some kind to attract youth teams and adult advisors (e.g., stipends, cameras, recognition, service learning or community service hours.) Environmental scan design and geographic boundaries will drive decisions regarding the number of volunteers or youth teams necessary to complete the activities as designed. Decide on the required number of volunteers and make-up of teams, if you will use youth teams. Be realistic about your capacity to manage numbers of volunteer resources.

> **Tip:** Use volunteers to make environmental scans more manageable and involve the community.

Adult advisors play an important role in your ability to recruit and involve young people that are willing and capable of completing important data collection requirements for the environmental scan portion of your needs assessment. Adults who work with youth and are interested in providing youth leadership and youth advocacy skills and meaningful youth participation in community problem-solving can be great volunteer contacts. Highly functioning youth teams are guided by adult advisors who instill confidence, provide support to the group with gentle guidance, make each team member feel safe, find ways for each team member to play an active role, and value individual contributions and "team work" equally.

Youth teams can be recruited from local schools, as well as colleges and universities. However, many community youth-based organizations have adult advisors that regularly work with youth groups (e.g., Scouts, SADD, Youth In Action, Boys/Girls Club, Explorers, Church Youth Groups, Key Clubs, Student Governments, etc). Teams can also represent various ethnic and faith-based organizations and should come from all geographic areas of the community. Contact coordinators of youth programs and school counselors to publicize the project and solicit their support as adult advisors of youth teams.

Some things to think about when using youth teams:

- Know how many teams you will need (find a few more, some may drop out)
- No more than 4 youth per team (with 1 adult advisor – a "car full")
- Age ranges from 11 to 20 (using teams from all age groups is good)
- Select youth with the capacity to complete project tasks (age appropriate for task)
- Organize enough teams to cover the entire community (geographic boundaries)
- Select teams with broad and diverse backgrounds and ethnicity (representing local demographic make-up)
- Select youth with an interest in alcohol prevention (no users)
- Use and keep track of permission/release forms
- Tie incentives to performance (reduces attrition)
- Celebrate activity and achievement (reduces attrition)

> **Tip:** If you would like to use youth volunteers and/or present the findings formally to the community, Bach Harrison can provide you with additional materials and information.

Develop a Written Action Plan

It is most important to develop a written action plan. Time spent planning is well spent, and time spent writing an action plan makes sure that planning time wasn't wasted. Remember the 5 P's – *Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance*. Because environmental scans ideally involve a number of people, you need to be clear on what everyone is doing where and when. Further, this has to be effectively communicated to them. A written action plan allows for this to happen. The plan should include brief detail on at least the following topics:

- What is being scanned
- Who will scan what when
- The protocol for scanning
- The resources needed (human, material and financial)
- Completion dates for all activities (assigned and monitored)

Avoid schedule conflicts when planning your project. Leave enough time between your environmental scan completion deadline and when you will want to use the data. Organize activities around times that are good for your local volunteers and avoid any potential scheduling conflicts. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce or other agencies knowledgeable about meetings scheduled for other non-profit and community groups, so that you do not schedule activities for prospective participants at conflicting times. Consider the timing of established prevention campaigns when planning your activities. Some circumstances may encourage your group to avoid these times; others may allow your efforts to coordinate with these. For example, Red Ribbon Week could be used to "kickoff" activities.

Finally, in creating your plan, consider whether your Coalition would like to share the results of the environmental scan formally with the community. This can work especially well if you are using youth teams – they can participate in creating and delivering the messages. You can also consider folding in other information gathered as part of the needs assessment as appropriate.

Conducting Environmental Scans

Each person or team should conduct their scan in a specific pre-determined geographically defined area of the community and within a pre-determined timeframe. Teams will observe, track and document specific information as they conduct their environmental scan (based on your design) using reporting forms. Forms have been developed for you for in the SPF SIG Tool Kit (Training Manual Section 7). You may find it useful to create additional forms based on how you decide to conduct your environmental scan or if you expand your environmental scan beyond that required. While the forms provided to you for the project only collect statistical and anecdotal data, you might also decide to collect photographic information. This is particularly true if you do a more comprehensive plan that involves sharing the findings with the community. The more thought and planning that has gone into conducting the scan, the more successful (and easier) conducting the actual scan will be.

Upon completion, you will need to summarize your findings. Forms have been provided for you in the SPF SIG Tool Kit (Training Manual Section 7) for doing so, although again, you may need to alter these or create your own if you have expanded the environmental scan.